



# Nursing students' experiences of lateral violence during clinical placements: a qualitative interview study and implications for nursing education

Katharina Tolksdorf<sup>1</sup>, Laura Püschel<sup>2</sup> Katrin Balzer<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Lübeck, Institute for Social Medicine and Epidemiology, Master's program Health and Healthcare Science, Lübeck, Schleswig-Holstein, Germany, E-Mail: [katharina.tolksdorf@student.uni-luebeck.de](mailto:katharina.tolksdorf@student.uni-luebeck.de)

<sup>2</sup>University of Lübeck, Institute for Social Medicine and Epidemiology, Nursing Research Unit, Lübeck, Schleswig-Holstein, Germany

FINE Europe Conference 2024, Barcelona (Spain), 21st and 22nd March 2024



# Background

- Nursing students are at high risk of experiencing violence in the training context [1]
- Violence often originates from nurses, a phenomenon usually described as "**nurses eating their young**" [2] or **lateral violence** [3]
- Lateral violence can lead to psychological stress [4], intention to terminate professional education and premature training drop-outs [1]
- **Two ways of nursing education in Germany** [5]:
  1. Generalist vocational training
  2. Academic undergraduate education

[1] Hallett et al., 2023, Nurse Education Today, 128:105845, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2023.105845>

[2] Aebersold & Schoville, 2020, Clinical Simulation in Nursing, 38:27–34, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecns.2019.10.002>

[3] Fernández-Gutiérrez & Mosteiro-Díaz, 2021, International Journal of Mental Health Nursing, 30(4):821–833, <https://doi.org/10.1111/inm.12854>

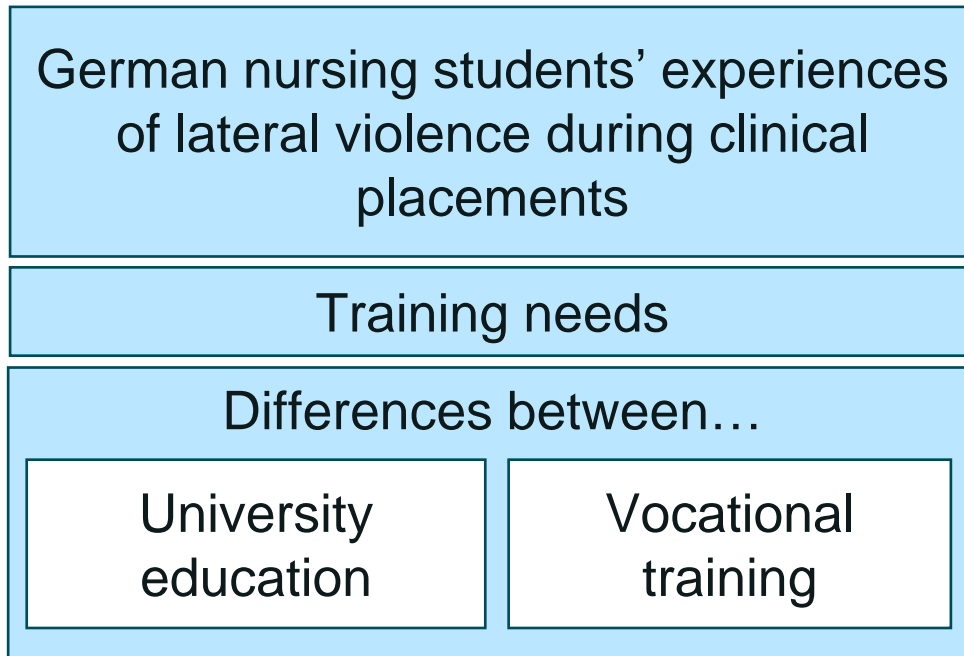
[4] Dafny et al., 2023, Journal of Clinical Nursing, jocn.16746, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jocn.16746>

[5] Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend (BMFSFJ), 2020, <https://www.bmfsfj.de/bmfsfj/service/gesetze/gesetz-zur-reform-der-pflegeberufe-pflegeberufereformgesetz--119230>

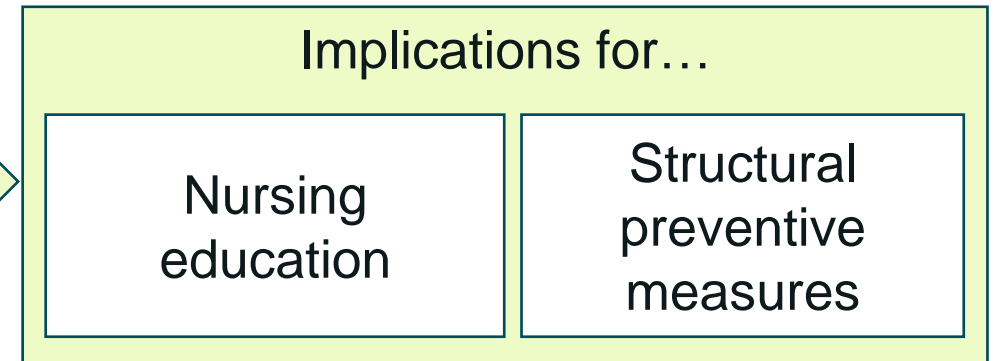


# Objectives

To explore...



To derive...



# Methods

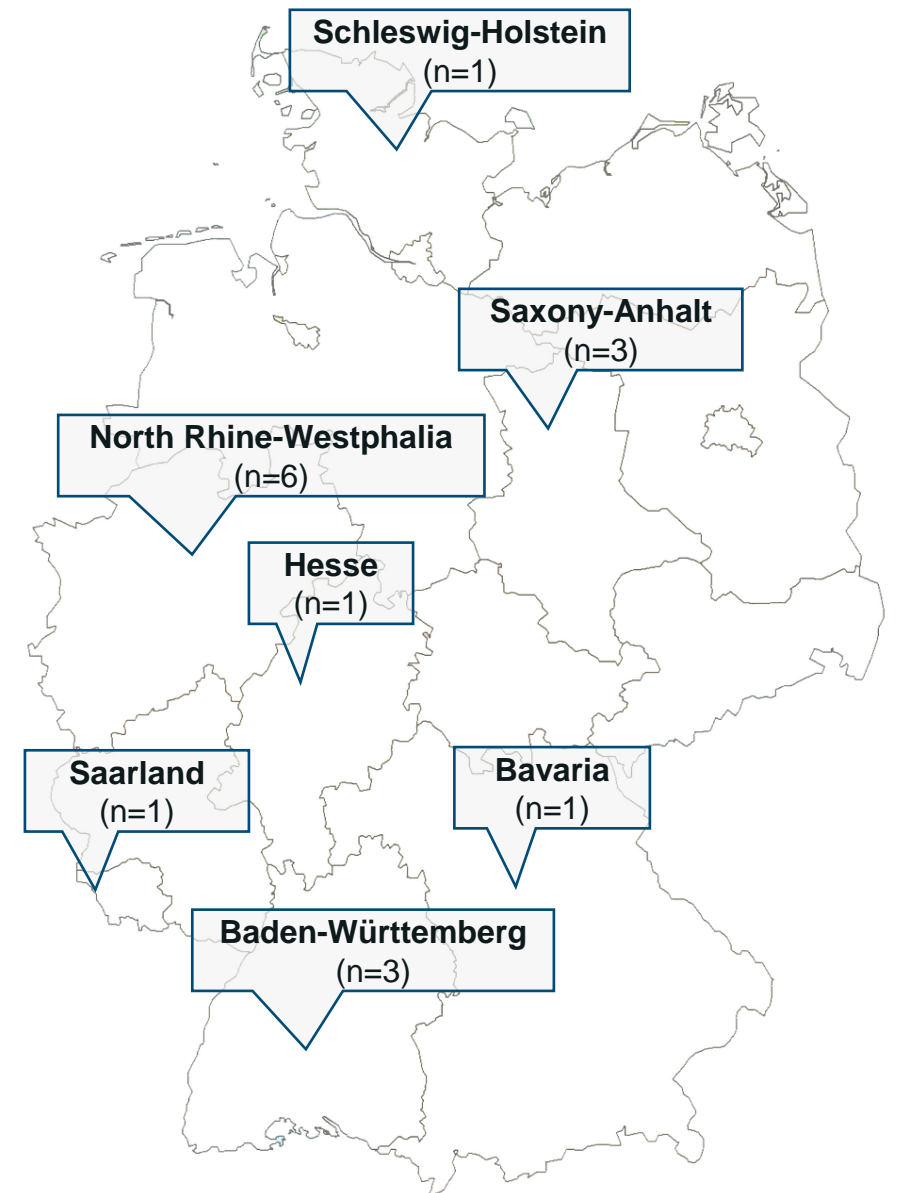
- **Metasynthesis of qualitative studies**
- **Qualitative interview study**
- **Recruitment:** Universities with undergraduate nursing education, nursing schools, German nursing influencers (*Instagram*)
- **Semi-structured interviews**
- **Qualitative content analysis** with deductive-inductive approach [6]
- **Group comparison:** quantitatively guided & identification of study- or training-specific themes

Tab. 1 *Inclusion criteria (condensed)*

Nursing students
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Current training employment for primary qualifying vocational or higher education nursing training in Germany</li><li>• Age <math>\geq 18</math> years</li><li>• First year of training completed</li><li>• At least one theoretical and one practical phase completed</li><li>• Experienced/observed lateral violence originating from nursing staff</li></ul>

# Results

- **16 interviews:** 8 university students, 8 vocational training students
- From 7 different german federal states
- Predominantly **between 18 and 24 years old** (n=12) and **female** (n=14)
- Mean length of training was **4.6 semesters**
- All of them rated their own **grade point average as above average or average** compared to their peers
- **Migration background** (n=6)



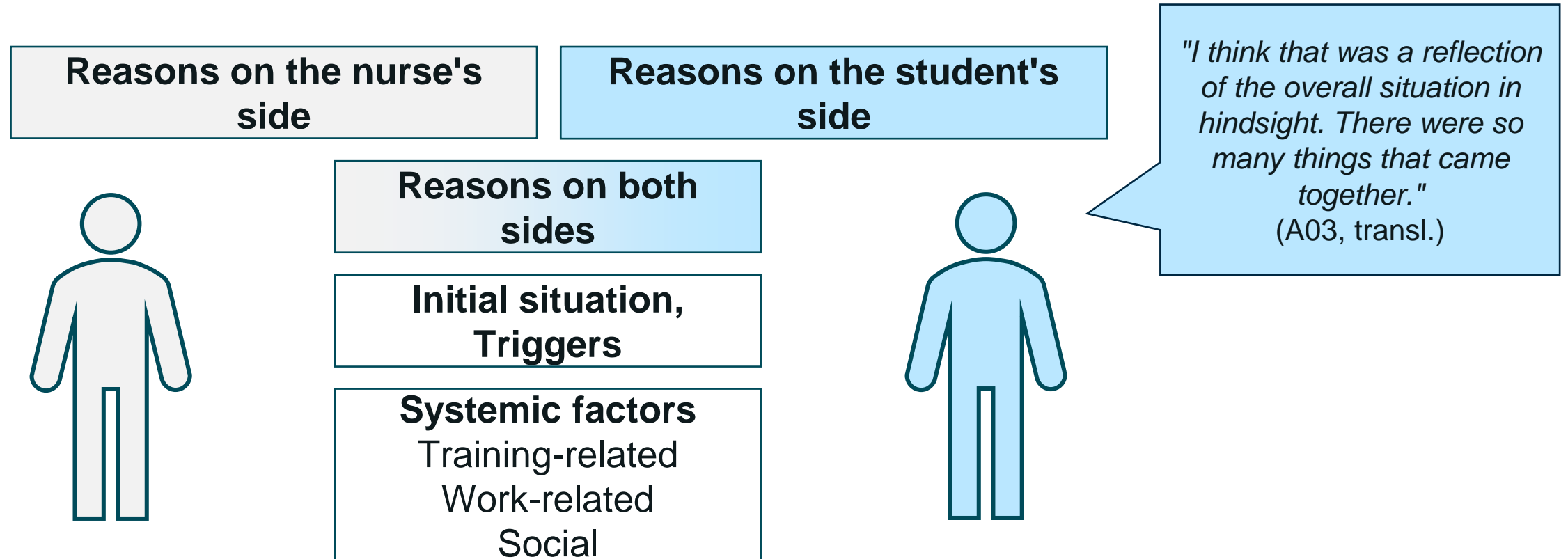
# Results *Experiencing lateral violence*

- **Time point of education:** 1st & 3rd third
- **Location:** All care settings, public places
- **Forms of violence:**
  - Primarily psychological/verbal
  - Neglect & exploitation
  - Physical violence
  - Sexualised violence
  - Discrimination: homophobia & racism

*"...that more and more often, especially as the training progressed, people said: "I'm not in the mood for this today, the student can do it."  
(S07, transl.)*

*"And when we got the resident on her feet, who was doing well so far, another colleague came up to me, really ran up to me with her hand raised and said that if she experienced something like that [a minor error when responding to a fall] again, she would smack me."  
(S05, transl.)*

# Results *Presumed reasons*



# Results *Consequences and coping strategies*

- **Physical effects:** Psychosomatic symptoms
- **Psychological effects:** Normalisation, negative emotions
- **Effects on personal development:**
  - Negative: learning losses, loss of motivation, professional and personal insecurities
  - Positive: e.g. desire to deal better with students themselves
- **Coping strategies:**
  - e.g. problem-oriented - disengagement: avoidance and rejection of violence-associated tasks and healthcare settings, consideration of dropping out of training or early career exit

*"Well, you don't really like going to work because you're always thinking: What's going to happen today? And that somehow makes you more and more unconfident and insecure."  
(A10, transl.)*





# Results *Training needs*

- **Education:**
  - Coping strategies, not becoming a perpetrator (self-competence)
  - Communication, conflict resolution (social skills)
  - Timing: 1st third of training with additional in-depth training
- **Structures:**
  - Further training for nursing staff: including content of the university education and generalist vocational training
  - Reporting: contact person, (anonymous) reporting system

*"But especially with the prospect that all students will eventually be qualified themselves [...]. You can certainly ensure that experiences of discrimination and violence decrease. Or, in the best case scenario, you can be an advocate for the students."  
(S08, transl.)*



# Results *Differences between university and vocational students*

- **University students experience accusations and prejudice because of their degree programme**
- Consequence: **Keeping quiet** about the degree programme
- University students expressed the need to learn how to **argue in favour of their degree**
- University students wish to **engage with peers in vocational training** in order to counter prejudices

*""Do you feel like you're someone better just because you're at university or something?" That comes up a lot."  
(S02, transl.)*



# Implications *Nursing education*

- Anchoring learning about lateral violence in the **curriculum**
- **Building professional, social- and self competence**
- **Methods:** Role play [7] , Cognitive rehearsal [8, 9, 10]
- **Timing:** 1st third of training with more in-depth training

[7] Sidhu und Park, 2018, Nurse Education Today, 65:169–176, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2018.03.005>

[8] Roberts et al., 2018, Nurse Educator, 43(5):262–266, <https://doi.org/10.1097/NNE.0000000000000478>

[9] Sanner-Stiehr, 2018, Nurse Education Today, 68:105–111, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2018.05.029>

[10] Wahi & Iheduru-Anderson, 2017, Journal of Nursing Education, 56(12):762–763, <https://doi.org/10.3928/01484834-20171120-12>



# Implications *Structural preventive measures*

- **Further training for nursing staff:**
  - Content of the nursing degree programme and generalist training
  - Sensitisation to violence and self-reflection
  - Health promotion & prevention of presenteeism
- **Conflict resolution** in nursing teams
- **Organisational and psychosocial support** for students
- **Reporting:** contact person, (anonymous) reporting system
- **Quality assurance:** sanctions for violent nurses and teams

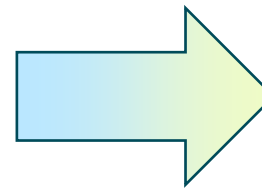
# Discussion and conclusions

- **Metasynthesis showed:**
  - Mainly gray literature from German speaking countries
  - Lateral violence has so far been studied in the margins of other research areas
  - Main target group: German vocational students
- **This research adds:**

Students experience mostly psychological/verbal violence, but also **physical and sexual violence and homophobia**

**Exploitation and neglect** are prominent, independent and closely related aspects of the experience of lateral violence of nursing students

**University students experience further prejudice**, wish to engage with vocational training students and practice arguing in favour of their degree



Students might benefit from **classroom and practical training prior to the first placement** and immediate reaction to violent nurses to stop further normalization of lateral violence



UNIVERSITÄT ZU LÜBECK

Thank you for your  
attention.

ResearchGate



Katharina Tolksdorf, M. Sc.  
E-Mail: [katharina.tolksdorf@uksh.de](mailto:katharina.tolksdorf@uksh.de)